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Penicillin Allergies Are Being Overreported, Making Testing Essential

TAMPA, Fla. – Dec. 4, 2017 – Allergic reactions to penicillin pose harmful health risks for both children and adults. Penicillin allergy is the most commonly reported drug allergy. However, national studies show that as many as nine in 10 patients who report an allergy to penicillin are not truly allergic. This has consequences for everyone, including higher medical costs from more expensive or less effective antibiotics, fewer antibiotic choices for severe infections, and an increase in drug-resistant bacteria. That's why Florida E.N.T. & Allergy is now offering penicillin allergy testing.

"Research shows that antibiotic costs for patients reporting a penicillin allergy are 63 percent higher than for those who do not. What's more, patients who are labeled penicillin-allergic have a threefold increased risk of adverse events. That's about 10 percent more hospital stays, and a 30 percent higher incidence of infections. Testing is simple and painless and cuts down on all of this," said Pamela Baines, M.D., a board certified otolaryngologist with Florida E.N.T. & Allergy.

Testing is done in one of two ways, through a traditional skin scratch assessment, or a graded oral challenge. With a skin test, the nurse administers a small amount of penicillin to the patient's skin through a scratch or injection. A positive reaction will cause a red, itchy, raised bump. If skin testing is negative for any reactions, an oral challenge is performed to confirm the absence of penicillin allergy. A graded challenge is used when a penicillin allergy is uncertain, or a doctor judges the allergy is unlikely based on symptoms. With this procedure, four or five doses of penicillin are given to the patient, starting with a small dose and increasing to the desired amount. If the patient reaches the therapeutic dose with no reaction, the doctor will conclude that they are not allergic to that type of penicillin.

"Patients who pass either the skin testing plus oral challenge or a graded challenge can generally take that particular drug as prescribed. We do have patients come in who are allergic to one type of penicillin and not another, and that's another challenge that these tests can overcome. If a penicillin allergy is detected, patients can take steps to make sure they avoid the antibiotic, and stay safe," said Dr. Baines.

For more information, visit www.floridaentandallergy.com or call (813) 879-8045.

About Florida E.N.T. & Allergy:

The physicians of Florida E.N.T. & Allergy have served the Tampa Bay community for over 40 years. From pediatric allergies to fitting hearing aids, our caring and experienced physicians specialize in ear, nose and throat care for the entire family using comprehensive, cutting-edge technologies. "

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